

The One Disinterested Gift

An Easter Story

By Amelia Wright

One spring day, the Saturday before Easter Sunday, a boy of fifteen trudging along a road with a little bundle containing his clothing stopped under a tree to eat a bite of luncheon he carried in his pocket. While he was there a girl a year or two younger than he came along and said to him:

"You look very tired. Have you come far?"

"I have walked all the way from L. since 4 o'clock this morning. I am going to the city and must reach it before night."

"What are you going there for?"

"To begin to make myself independent. I am a half orphan with a step-mother. She has made it so disagreeable for me at home that I can stay there no longer."

"Have you any friends in the city to help you?"

"No."

"Any money to use till you get a start?"

"No."

"What will you do for food and for a place to sleep?"

"As for food, I will go hungry; as for a place to sleep, I hear there are benches in the parks."

A great girl welled up into the girl's eyes. Presently she unfolded her palm and uncovered a crisp five dollar bill. She looked at it longingly, then extended it to the boy. "Take this," she said. "My uncle gave it to me for a birthday present. I am thirteen years old today."

"What were you going to do with it?"

"I was going to buy a sweater. All the girls have sweaters, and I have long wanted one. But you will need it far more than I. It may keep you till you get a position."

The offer of this money was the only sacrifice the boy had ever experienced. Thus far whatever had been given him had come from those whose duty it was to protect him, but everything he had received had come grudgingly.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Laura."

"Laura what?"

"Laura Maryweather."

"And you think me so despicable as to take from you your birthday gift?"

Nothing would induce me to do so. I am going to the city to make my fortune. I have learned the value of money by hard knocks, and I shall take more such lessons. I shall make people pay for what they get out of me, and I shall work, work, work, and save, save, save, until I am rich. But I will do it all myself. I will be beholden to no one."

"What are you going to do with your money when you get it?"

"Do with it? Well, one thing I will do with it—I will hold it up to glitter before the eyes of those who have denied me those things a boy desires, and I will make them feel how easy it would be to make them happy, but I won't."

The girl looked at him through a pair of eyes that grew big with wonder, mingled with which was an expression of reproach. Finally she said:

"Aren't you a queer boy?"

"Do you think that too?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I am queer since you say so. Others have told me that, but I would not believe them. Well, I must get on. Goodby."

"Aren't you going to thank me for offering you my birthday gift?"

"No. Thanks are empty words."

"Well, you have taught me a lesson in courage and independence, for which I thank you very much."

The boy turned away from her with out another word. She watched him till he passed out of sight, then said to herself:

"That's the queerest boy I ever saw in my life."

After that she went on to the village and bought a sweater.

And what did the boy say of the girl as he drew away from her? "That girl is the biggest fool I ever met."

Twenty years passed. Laura Maryweather in a worldly point of view fulfilled the boy's opinion of her. She gave first to others, second to herself. As to economy, she never knew what it meant. The day came when she passed beyond her father's and mother's care and was obliged to take care of herself, being impelled to work very hard. She was always giving away things she needed herself, taking no forethought for her future and spending what money she devoted to her own use without much wisdom. She was the personification of improvidence.

When she was twenty-five she married a man named Spellmeyer, who had no better head for getting on in the world than herself. Several children were born to her, then her husband died and left her with just what she had when he married her—nothing. Another five years passed, during which her children were growing older and needing more and more every year. Then she broke down in both health and spirit.

One morning the postman left a letter for her containing a check for \$20 signed with a name she had never heard before, Simon Winkle. The letter said that on Saturday before Easter there was to be an auction sale of

household furniture in the city. "Attend the sale and bid on a cake of maple sugar." The check bore date of several months before, and the envelope looked a little faded. The recipient was puzzled beyond measure. There was nothing to eat in the house and she was furnished with \$25 with which to buy a cake of maple sugar probably not worth a dollar. She spent the money for necessities.

One trait common with all curiosity, led her to attend the sale. She tried to borrow a dollar to take with her to buy the maple sugar, but though she applied to those indebted to her, no one could spare the amount at the time, so she went with but a few cents in her pocket.

She found that a man supposed to be wealthy had died and left no will, so far as had thus far been discovered. He had left instructions that his household effects be sold at auction and all his relatives be hidden to the sale. An army of these persons were there, believing that a legacy would be contained in some of the articles sold. As soon as the auctioneer mounted the stand a spirited bidding commenced on everything that was hauled. Crockery, knives and forks that could not be used to conceal a treasure, went for nothing. Mrs. Spellmeyer regretted that she had spent her \$25, for she could have bought lots of things she wanted for a song. But sofas, bureaus and desks with locked drawers brought fabulous prices. As soon as an article was knocked down to a bidder it was torn to pieces in the hope of finding a sum of money, stocks, bonds or jewelry.

Finally some kitchen stores were put up and among other things a cake of maple sugar. Mrs. Spellmeyer by this time began to suspect that the deceased had intended to favor her, but she could scrape together only 7 cents of the money provided to secure the sugar. She made the first bid on it she made on anything, and this attracting attention, the cake was soon up to \$10, so she lost it.

Meanwhile there was a smashing and a tearing to pieces of all sorts of articles as fast as they were bought.

The sale was over without any large sum being discovered, though those who had made purchases were still pulling to pieces what they had bought. One old lady who had bought a bed had ripped the ticking off the mattress and was throwing the contents aside as a ship throws the waves from her bow. A man who had purchased an iron box (locked and no key) was drilling a hole in it with a view to inserting an explosive and blowing it open. A boy was chopping to piece a bureau the drawers of which could not be removed in any other way. A young girl added to the din by trying to blow bank bills out of a cornet's piston. At the moment some one stole in the head of a drum.

The auctioneer, standing on the platform with a bit of paper in his hand, rapped with his gavel. When he had secured attention he began to speak.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the intention of the deceased in ordering this sale has been discovered. One of the articles sold, a cake of maple sugar, was broken apart and this paper found within: 'I give and bequeath all my property, real and personal, to Laura Spellmeyer, nee Maryweather.'"

There was a hush for a moment, followed by a howl of disappointed rage. The auctioneer rapped and cried above the din, "Is Laura Spellmeyer present?"

The widow, not knowing whether she was on her heels or her head, stood up and said she was the party called for. A sleek looking gentleman advanced toward her and stated that he had been the deceased's attorney and had the care of the property. He had forwarded to her the mysterious letter she had received. It had been left with him by the testator some time before his death.

A crowd gathered round the widow, composed mostly of those who had expected little or nothing, to congratulate her. To their questions as to her connection with the deceased she replied that she had never heard of him, whereupon the attorney said that the testator had told him the reason for willing his property as he did.

In all his life he had received but one offer of purely disinterested kindness. When journeying to the city a penniless boy he had met a girl who offered him a five dollar bill she had just received for a birthday gift. That girl he made his heir.

Mrs. Spellmeyer tried to remember the incident, but failed. It had occurred many years before, when she was a child, and it had passed out of her memory.

She was receiving congratulations, her face wreathed in smiles, when the lawyer asked her if she knew how much money she had inherited.

"La' sakes," she exclaimed, "I never thought of that!"

"Guess."

"A thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars! It's more than a million."

"Oh, my goodness gracious! I wonder how I came to deserve such treatment of my heavenly father."

"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these ye did it unto the king."

In the collection plate in Mrs. Maryweather's congregation the next day was an Easter offering of \$100,000 for a new church and another \$100,000 for an endowment. This was only the beginning of the widow's gifts. She seemed to take as much pleasure in scattering her money as the man from whom she inherited it had taken in hoarding it. The only smart thing she ever said was in this connection:

"The Lord needs two people to dispense benefactions—one to get money together, another to scatter it."

The Lehighway

To all other journeys East of the Rockies, it is like grand opera compared to a society drama. It's the highway for confirmed tourists and for people who seldom leave home. Wherever you live it pays you to go out of your way to take the Lehighway to and from Buffalo.

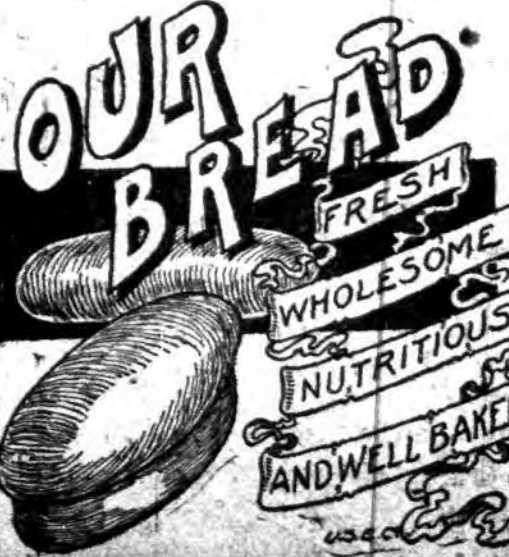
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PROPOSES BOARD OF PUBLIC WELFARE FOR SCHENECTADY

George R. Lunn, Socialist Mayor, Would Inaugurate Novel Plan.

The mayor of Schenectady, N. Y., George R. Lunn, elected last November by the Socialist party, believes that he and the party are looked to for a change in principles of government such as is not expected to follow the accession to power of one of the older parties. In an address to the city council recently he recommended that as a preliminary act these be created a board of public welfare. This he thought especially appropriate because the change expected is to give human welfare precedence over business in the activities of the government. His idea of the purpose of such a board he explains as follows:

"A board like this, in order to serve the city adequately, should unite in one body for consistent action those city officials who are most directly concerned with what may properly be called the social interests of the city. These officials would in my opinion include the mayor, the president of the common council, the health officer, the commissioner of charities, the superintendent of schools, the commissioner of public works and the secretary to the mayor. To these officials should be added two citizens acquainted with the city's problems and with the spirit of modern social reconstruction. No sex qualifications ought to be placed against these appointments, in order that the administration may be free to enlarge the spirit of its work by enlisting the services of women."

"The problem which this board can approach is, broadly speaking, the social problem itself, the problem of society's neglect of its human resources, the problem of enlarging and enriching the lives of the people. It should become an agent of the city specifically devoted to human welfare."

To carry out the purpose of this board he believes a "social survey" is necessary in order to substitute facts and acts for good intentions only.

"The board might undertake child welfare work, supplementing and coordinating the duties of the health officer and the schools. It could take up the pressing work of recreation—of parks, playgrounds, dances, concerts, social centers, festivals, gymnasiums, swimming pools and moving picture shows; it could take steps toward beautifying the city and providing art exhibits; it could supervise skating rinks, tobogganing, municipal ice plants and workhouses; it could take up the provision of free legal aid, the management of the employment bureau, and the introduction of greater efficiency into city departments; it might supervise libraries, extend their services and bring them to greater usefulness."

NEW DRINKING FOUNTAINS.

Bridgeport, Conn., to Install Sanitary Innovations in Schools.

As soon as possible the new drinking fountains which have been ordered by the Bridgeport (Conn.) board of education will be placed in the public schools of the city for the use of the pupils, and another week should see them installed.

Since the law prohibiting the common drinking cup from being used in Connecticut on account of the ravages of the "great white plague" none has been used in the public schools. The new fountains, of which there are forty-eight, are composed of five jets combining into one, a turn of a small lever allowing the water to flow. In this manner the lips of the person drinking touch nothing but the stream of water, and all danger of carrying tuberculosis germs is eliminated.

The price of the new fountains is approximately \$6, so that the innovation is not an expensive one, but an exceedingly healthy one. Two will be placed in each school.

STOP KICKIN' THE TOWN AROUND.

In every town folks keep some houn' aroun',
An' every time strangers come to town
Some folks go to kickin' the town aroun',
It's even worse'n kickin' a houn'.

Stop your kickin', be hopeful an' profuse,
It's a mighty poor way to build up a town
To keep kickin' public morals aroun',
Who wants to locate in a town that's down?

This is the best town anywhere aroun',
But like others, we've a few ol' houn's
Who get at the stranger who's in town;
Say the town's a houn' an' kick it aroun'.

If a houn' 's a houn', a town 's a town,
And it can't build up if kicked aroun'.
You have a right to kick your own houn',
But it hurts us all if you kick the town.

Let's pull together for the good of the town
An' stop kickin' our houn's aroun',
Though the houn' 's a myth will make a sound,
A hounded town gets a stranger's frown.
—Ashley (Ind.) News.

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